BUDDHISM

vis-à-vis

HINDUISM[1]

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[‘Buddhism vis-à-vis Hinduism’ (1958, revised 1984) is the first booklet on Hindu religion by Shri Ram Swarup. It was written just after Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism in 1956. It took a moderate view of the much-debated relation of Buddhism to its mother tradition, affirming that the Buddha was a Hindu (just as Jesus was a Jew), but conceding that Buddhism had a typical atmosphere setting it apart from the Hindu mainstream.]

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Buddhism is returning home to India after a long exile of a thousand years and, like the proverbial prodigal son, is being received with open arms. Religious tolerance of the average Hindu partly explains the warm reception. But a very important reason is the fact that Buddha and Buddhism form an intimate part of Hindu consciousness. Buddha was a Hindu. Buddhism is Hindu in its origin and development, in its art and architecture, iconography, language, beliefs, psychology, names, nomenclature, religious vows and spiritual discipline. Though living in distant lands for so long, it remains essentially Hindu, at least, in the expression of its religious ideals and spiritual experience at the highest level. Hinduism is not all Buddhism, but Buddhism forms part of the ethos which is essentially Hindu.

Though that is the general reaction of an average Hindu who carries within him the memories of a distant past, academic scholarship, dealing in views and schools of thought as self-sufficient entities and discussing religious systems of thought divorced from the living tradition of religion, has reached quite a different conclusion. According to these scholars and translators, Buddhism was a revolt against Hinduism, not only against certain prevalent sacrificial cults

and certain rigidities in caste organization, but also against the whole spiritual tradition and premises of the age.

In fact, certain intellectuals and groups of materialist-secularist persuasion are extending a warm welcome to Buddhism because in it they see a timely corrective to the "supernatural prejudices" of Hinduism regarding God and Soul, "superstitions which weaken a nation". According to them, Buddha was rather a clever student of logical positivism, a thorough-going rationalist and empiricist. Endowed with healthy scepticism, he saw through the so-called established truths of religion, but being also discreet he refrained from expressing his real opinions on religious questions too fully and openly. Thus observing tactical silence over religious questions he taught people a rational morality called his three Shilas, in this way lopping off by means of an Occam's razor the whole mystical superstructure.

Thus Buddhism is being recommended as a school of rationality and social morality without the superfluous adjuncts of religion: morality without God or Soul.[2]

A deeper study does not support these evaluations of Buddhism. True, Buddha was a great mind whose eyes pierced through the show of things to their core, but he was no rationalist in the modern sense of the term. Instead, he had a healthy contempt for intellectual systems and theories so popular with rationalists of all ages. On more than one occasion (in Aggi-vacchagotta sutta, Majjhima Nikay, for example), he called these theories "a net of sophistry (diTThi-jala), a web of tangle (diTThi-ganthi), a jungle (diTThi-gahana), a wilderness (diTThi-kantara), a thorn or puppet-show (diTThi-visuka), a writhing (diTThi-vipphandita), a fetter (diTThi-saMyojana), and an intoxicant (diTThi-asava)...

coupled with misery, ruin, despair and agony (dukkha, vighata, daurmanasya, upayasa)". For arriving at truth, he did not adopt the method of classification, comparison, verification, deduction, experimentation which is what rational approach means, but the method of moral purification, meditation, intuition, passive waiting combined with alert watchfulness, steady and sustained aspiration, all leading to transcendental illumination, progressive or sudden - the method of going beyond discursive mind for the light of the Truth.

Nor do we agree with the other view which equates Buddhism with a moral discipline alone. Buddha himself rejected this view of his teachings in no uncertain terms. He affirmed that his teachings on moral conduct were "not significant" and were only of "secondary, importance." He declared that his teachings regarding meditation (samadhi) and transcendental knowledge (prajna) were the most important. Those who admired him for his moral teachings alone were, according to him, "witlings", men of ordinary intelligence (puthujjana).[3]

So Buddha's rationality and morality had a transcendental base above. This transcendence is the highlight and essence of Buddha's teachings, the justification of his claim to be a great world teacher and guide.

Similarly, Buddha's compassion was not merely secular or even humanistic; rather it was a deep and living concern of the "Enlightened One" for worldly creatures caught in the wheel of existence, birth, disease, decay, old age, death. The peace he taught was Upanishadic "peace beyond understanding", not merely civic and political truce amongst men and nations. The joy he taught was not just a physical release of tension or a

physical sense of well-being or even some psychological euphoria; on the other hand, it was the joy of emancipation from the web of repeated births.

After this brief digression, we come back to the point from where we started, namely, the relationship of Buddhism with Hinduism.

A discussion of this relationship is important for various reasons. Firstly, because it will help us to understand the deeper ideas and ideals of half the world which owes allegiance to the two religions. Secondly, because it will be interesting and instructive to see how the world's two most ancient, most mystical, most abiding, most creative religions have expressed their intuition of the Transcendent. Thirdly, because, it may help all spiritual seekers in their inner exploration, illumine their paths and give voice to their own experiences. To understand the two religions is to understand some of the deepest questions relating to spiritual theology, a whole gamut of yogic practices and spiritual disciplines.

Buddha's Silence

The nature of relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism is clouded and misunderstood and its intimacy minimized for two reasons.

One reason is Buddha's silence over such fundamental questions as Brahma, God and soul, questions which occupy the centre of interest in the Upanishadic literature. The other reason is Buddha's individual nuances and emphases. These nuances are not lacking in the Upanishads; but there they form only a part of a larger whole, and, therefore, do not create the same one-sided impression of escapism and painfulness of existence.

First, we shall discuss Buddha's silence. The reasons why he refrained from discussions relating to God and soul are two. He refused to answer all questions that did not lead to an individual's practical spiritual benefit. Spirituality tends to be very practical. It avoids all idle preoccupation with intellectual systems.

It was eminently necessary in the days of Buddha. From the Buddhist accounts of those days one finds that the country was reeking with innumerable soul-losing systems of thought, a bewildering maze of opinions in which the mind was irretrievably lost. There prevailed 62 systems of philosophy, 18 theories regarding the origin of the world, 44 theories regarding its end. There were 23 methods of penance in food, 12 in clothing. There were interminable discussions regarding the state of the soul after death. There were akriyavadins, daivavadins, jaDavadins, akritavadins, aniSchitavadins, dialecticians and intellectuals of all varieties. There were big halls in every city where intellectuals foregathered and discussed theories regarding God, soul, time and space. No wonder the soul got lost in these intellectual exercises. Mentation became a perfect substitute for God-seeking. For a spiritualist, this atmosphere is truly uninviting. Right effort is more important than idle cerebration. No wonder Buddha refused to entertain these questions. Clever people would come to him and put the same question in several forms (mostly in the form of the quadrilemma), but Buddha responded to them with silence.

That the interests of Buddha were fully practical is very well brought out by a dialogue the Blessed One had with a monk named Venerable MaluNkyaputta. The monk said to himself: "These theories which the Blessed One has left unelucidated, has set aside and rejected - that the world is

eternal, that the world is not eternal, that the world is finite, that the world is infinite, that the soul and the body are identical, that the soul is one thing and the body another, that the saint exists after death, that the saint does not exist after death, that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death - these the Blessed One does not elucidate to me." He therefore decided that if the Blessed One did not do that he would abandon religious discipleship.

The Blessed One called him dull and silly (mogha-purusha) and answered his doubts with the help of an inimitable illustration. He began by saying: "It is as if, MaluNkyaputta, a man had been wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his relatives and kinsfolk, were to procure for him a physician or surgeon; and the sick man was to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until 1 have learnt whether the man who wounded me belonged to the warrior caste, or to the Brahmin caste, or to the agricultural caste, or to the menial caste; learnt his name and the clan he belonged to; learnt whether he was tall, short, or of the middle height; was black, dusky or of a yellow skin; was from this or that village or town or city; whether the bow which wounded me was a chapa or a kodaNDa; whether the bowstring was made from swallow-wort or bamboo or sinew or marava or from wilk-weed; whether the shaft was a kaccha or a repima; whether it was feathered from the wings of a vulture, a heron, a falcon, a peacock, or a sithilahanu; whether it was wound round with the sinews of an ox, a buffalo, a ruru dear or of a monkey; whether it was an ordinary arrow, or a claw-headed arrow, or a vekaNDa, or an iron arrow, or a calf-tooth arrow, or a karavirapaTTa'. That man would die MaluNkyaputta, without ever having learnt this."

"In exactly the same way," Lord Buddha added, "MaluNkyaputta, any one who should say, 'I will not lead the religious life under the Blessed Once until the Blessed One shall elucidate to me either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal ... or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death;' - that person would die, MaluNkyaputta, before the Tathagat had ever elucidated to him."

The teacher further concluded: "The religious life, MaluNkyaputta, does not depend on the dogma that the world is eternal, infinite or finite, that the soul and the body are identical or different, or the dogma that the saint exists or does not exist after death." The elucidation of these points is bootless. It "profits not, nor has it to do with the fundamentals of religion, nor tends to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, the supernatural faculties, supreme wisdom, and Nirvan." (Chulla-MaluNkya-sutta, Majjhima Nikay 2.2.3)

Ineffability of Transcendental Experience

There was another reason why Buddha refused to discuss metaphysical questions. It was not only the futility of these questions, but the impossibility of answering them in a language intelligible to the mind. The Ken Upanishad says: "There the eye goes not; speech goes not, nor the mind. We know not, we understand not. How one would teach it?" Buddha found himself in the same predicament. Things which according to all spiritual literature lie beyond mind cannot be rendered into mental concepts. Any answer made to these questions therefore "does not fit the case", as Buddha emphasized repeatedly.

Buddha illustrated this point with the help of a very apt analogy which, incidentally, also indicated his view of the

question of the real status of a liberated soul. If a fire were to burn in front of you, you would be aware of this fact. You would also be aware of the fact that the fire depended on fuel of grass and wood for its burning. Further, if this fire were to become extinct, you would also be aware of this fact. "But, Vaccha [a mendicant of vats gotra], if some one were to ask you, 'In which direction has that fire gone, - east, or west or south?' - what would you say, O Vaccha?" asked the great teacher.

"The question would not fit the case, Gautama. For the fire which depended on fuel of grass and wood, when that fuel has all gone, and it can get no other, being thus without nutriment, is said to be extinct," Vaccha replied.

Buddha concluded: "In exactly the same way, Vaccha, all form, all consciousness by which one could predicate the existence of the saint, when that form and consciousness have been abandoned, uprooted, pulled out of the ground like a palmyra-tree, and become non-existent and not liable to spring up again in the future. The saint, O Vaccha, who has been released from what is styled as form and consciousness is deep, immeasurable, unfathomable (gambhira, appameyya, duppariyogaho) like the mighty ocean. To say that he is reborn would not fit the case. To say that he is not reborn would not fit the case. To say that he is both reborn and not reborn would not fit the case. To say that he is neither reborn nor yet reborn would not fit the case." (*Agg-vaccha sutta, Majjhima Nikay* 2.3.2)

In a parallel passage, the Mundak Upanishad says:

As the flowing rivers in the ocean

Disappear, quitting name and form,

So the Knower, being liberated from name and form,

Goes unto the Heavenly Person, higher than the high.

Indeed, what could be said about the status of the freed Soul or Self? Can it be called individual, or universal, or transcendental? Can this state be described or measured? Can it be called existence, or non-existence in our sense of the terms? The state is deep, immeasurable, unfathomable.

The Vedanta has not given a different answer. True, its language has been more positive, but the answer has not been dissimilar. According to the Mandukya Upanishad the transcendental reality is *a-drishta* (unseen), *a-grahya* (ungraspable), *a-chintya* (non-thinkable), *a-lakshana* (non-distinctional), *a-vyapadesya* (undesignable).

When the soul or self is enthralled in matter, in the relativity of things, in names and forms, what "one" knows (or rather what is known) is change, flux, pain, bondage, a cluster of sensation-groups which one regards as one's self. But when the knot of existence has been loosened, when the world of names and forms dissolves, vanishes, the saint or the freed soul enters into a state which is "deep, immeasurable, unfathomable like a mighty ocean" and which is, as we shall see, characterized by the attributes of freedom, peace, bliss and consciousness.

The Nature of Buddha's Experience of Nirvan

There are two methods of dealing with a problem: practical and theoretical; psychological and metaphysical. For example, the Samkhya discusses tattvas, principles; the Yoga assuming those principles, discusses methodology, the processes. Similarly, while the Vedanta discusses principles, the nature of the Supreme Reality, Buddhism discusses methods, the moral and meditational disciplines leading to supernatural experiences whose nature Buddha refused to describe. True, Buddha also speaks of prajna, the four noble truths, but these

too are offered in the first instance for practical purposes, for the purpose of fixing one's mind on them, for creating a state of vairagya in the aspirant, for turning him away from the world of names and forms. Their full transcendental meaning is revealed only at the end. And when that happens, that is Buddhahood, Enlightenment, Nirvan whose nature he refused to discuss.

But can we guess, in the face of Buddha's silence, the meaning of what he meant? By guessing, I do not mean arriving at and knowing the truths as he knew them. That is not given to intellect at all. By guessing, I mean, can we place him in the spiritual tradition? That is - was Buddha just a freak in the sense that what happened to him happened to none else before and to none else after him except of course to some of his bright disciples? Or was he a mighty representative, a leader of a well-authenticated spiritual tradition such as is so highly developed in the Upanishads and confirmed by great teachers and seers of ancient times? In short, did he belong to a spiritual tradition which is timeless; or was he a freak, an accident in the spiritual tradition of his country?

I believe that posed thus the question is not difficult to answer. His spiritual experience could not be a freak, arbitrary and personal. It must have been of a character universal and necessary. There is reason to believe that his spiritual experience was wholly in the Vedantic tradition. This conclusion is inescapable as one studies Buddha's teachings. Buddha himself claims no more. He only claims to have "seen an ancient way, an ancient road followed by the wholly awakened ones of olden times". In Buddhism as in the Vedanta, self-abnegation was to precede a transcendental experience. One has to discover the voidness of the seeming full before one can discover the fullness of the seeming void.

"Not by speech, not by mind, not by sight can He be apprehended." Desire has to go. All mental constructions, imagination and fancy have to go. "When cease the five sense knowledge, together with the mind and the intellect stirs not," "When are cut all the knots of the heart on earth," then begins the dawn of the spiritual knowledge and freedom. Buddha confirms the Upanishadic truth above. He says, "The Tathagat, O Vaccha, is free from all theories; but this, Vaccha, does the Tathagat know, - the nature of form (rup), and how form arises, and how form perishes; the nature of sensation (vedana), and how sensation arises, and how sensation perishes; the nature of perception (saMjna), and how perception arises, and how perception perishes; the nature of the predispositions (samskara), and how the predispositions arise, and how the predispositions finish; the nature of consciousness (vijnana), and how consciousness arises, and how consciousness perishes. Therefore say I that the Tathagat has attained deliverance and is free from attachment, in as much as all imaginings, or agitations, or false notions concerning an Ego or anything pertaining to an Ego, have perished, have faded away, have been given up and relinquished." The seeming self, the vital as well as the mental, which is mistaken for the permanent and the eternal has to fall silent.

Not only in the self-noughting of the phenomenal but also in the characterization of the transcendental, Buddha follows the Upanishads. The nihilistic rendering by which Buddhism is known today is caused by some of his future followers but there is nothing in the teachings of the Master himself to support this negativism.[4] "The Deathless has been found by me," declared Buddha after his enlightenment. Nirvan was described as a state "in which there is neither old age, nor fear,

nor disease, nor birth, nor death, nor anxiety". In Udana (Suttapitaka), it is called abhuta, ajata, akaTa, asaNkhata (unbecome, unborn, unmade, uncompound). This is almost the language of the Vedanta, the THAT of the Upanishads, declared to be imperishable, deathless, free, unborn, self-existent (svayambhu), uncompassing (paribhu) by Isa Upanishad; resplendent (divya), formless (a-murta), pure (Subhra) by Mundak Upanishad; timeless (a-kala), without parts (a-kala), great glory (mahad yaSas) by SvetaSvatara Upanishad. In this state which is called Nirvanic by Buddha and Brahmic by the Vedanta, there is a complete cessation of diminution or development; it is the state of prapancho-paSama as the Mandukya Upanishad declares. It is self-same eternally and "deep, immeasurable and unfathomable".

The interesting account of Buddha's spiritual experience of enlightenment confirms and closely agrees with the Upanishadic teaching regarding the nature of the Ultimate Reality.

"At that time The Buddha, The Blessed One, was dwelling at Uruvela at the foot of the Bo-tree on the banks of the river Niranjana, having just attained the Buddhaship. Then the Blessed one sat cross-legged for seven days together at the foot of the Bo-tree experiencing the bliss of emancipation...

Then the Blessed One after the lapse of seven days, arose from that state of exalted calm, and leaving the foot of the Botree ... sat cross-legged at the foot of the Ajapala banyan tree for seven days together, experiencing the bliss of emancipation."

Thus he kept enjoying this supernatural calm and bliss for 49 days at a stretch moving from tree to tree every seven days.

Here the experience of Nirvan is not couched in the language of "nothingness", "emptiness", but is constituted of "exalted calm, bliss, emancipation, bodhihood". It is just as the Upanishads speak, Shanti, peace that passeth understanding, sat, chit, anand, knowledge, freedom, light.[5] In the spiritual tradition this state has been called both void as well as all and full.

Nothingness of the Phenomenal World

So, at the time of enlightenment, Gautama not only entered a state which was "deep, immeasurable, unfathomable", not only saw a reality full of "calm", "bliss," "liberation" and quite indescribable as the Upanishads assert, but was also vouchsafed the vision of the true status of the phenomenal world. This vision was not different from the Vedantic characterization of this world. Buddha saw in a moment the entire process which constitutes this samsar, this world-cycle, this fleeting stream of life. He saw that which causes births and rebirths without end, which frames the edifice of repeated births, decay, dissolution and death. He saw the mighty Law of Karma, the Law of Dependent Origination (pratitya samutpada): he saw the twelve links in the chain that constitutes the "wheel of life". He saw that the root of all existence is avidya (nescience, ignorance); from this arises samskara (predispositions, or unshakable volitions or chetana, the compelling kamma which produces rebirth); from this comes vijnana (the rebirth or relink consciousness); it is the basic consciousness with which one is born; in it reside all the past impressions, characteristics and tendencies of the individual life. Corresponding to this consciousness arises a psycho-physical individuality called nama-rupa. Suitable to this individuality follow the six organs of sense and their six-fold spheres, shadDayatana. Then follows sparsh (contact of

the subjective with the objective world); then come successively vedana (feeling, sensation), trishna (craving, or thirst for life), upadan (grasping and clinging to life; it gives birth to a false notion of "I" and "mine"); bhava (renewed existence, or those active and passive psychological forces which condition future birth); jati (rebirth), followed by jara-maran (old age and death), Soka-parideva, daurmanasya-upayasa (tribulation, grief, sorrow, distress and despair). Round and round. The doctrine is deep and the meanings of the terms describing the process have to be fixed internally through sadhana.

Buddha saw the law forward and backward. He saw how it gave rise to the entire aggregate of misery. He also saw how on the complete fading out and cessation of the last term or link, the whole chain snaps and the entire aggregation of misery ceases. And as he saw the law of the phenomenal world, he was also released from its bondage. He sang:

O builder! I have discovered thee!

This fabric thou shalt never rebuild!

Thy rafters are all broken now,

And pointed roof demolished lies!

The mind has demolition reached,

And seen the last of all desire!

What Buddha experienced was the vision, celebrated in the Upanishads, that the world of man divorced from Brahma, the phenomenal world conceived independently of the transcendental principle is nothing, is less than nothing. Conceived as such it is an illusion, maya, an imposition, a house of cards, a castle of sand, mere saw-dust, dry-rot, a

sagging, sinking, stinking garbage-heap. They build in vain who build without That.

This "builder" who weaves the fabric of existence is everywhere. Its power is found to be so flimsy when the true knowledge comes, but before that it is so nightmarishly real. Having no support anywhere in essence, it is yet so ubiquitous in its external expression. It surrounds one on all sides. It seeps through every pore. It is laid thick layer upon layer. It is gross as well as subtle. Its empire is vast. Its sovereignty is everywhere. It lives not only in the grosser acts and thoughts of men, it lives in their righteousness, ideals and good too. No wonder sages who have seen its universal sway have tried to describe it by different images and names. They call it lila, maya, avidya, Inconscience. This power is the author of the whole realm of names and forms, good as well as bad. So maya or avidya is not just like wrong perception or an error of judgement; it is a basic category which imposes itself at the very source of all phenomenal perceptions and judgements, enters into the very constitution and fibre of our empirical knowledge, effort and will.

Though so compelling and powerful, yet when the transcendental light dawns, it is either completely transfigured or it completely disappears like mist before the sun. Men and women of a deeper seeking have found the phenomenal world joyless and unfulfilling, and they have sought release from its insufficiency, and yearned with all their heart to be granted refuge at the feet of the Divine. There are beautiful poems by Kabir, Surdas, Ramprasad and Mira on the subject which echo the cry of the human soul in bondage and exile for freedom and re-union in and with the Divine from whom they came.

The dying-to-self, inner purification, transcendence from the world of mind and desires are normal things that happen to any saint of stature, but the process is generally silent. It is rare that the knowledge of the origin and the dissolution of the whole world of all names and forms is revealed so powerfully and intimately as it was to Buddha. Again, in other saints sufficient deepening or silencing of the surface mind and being is enough for higher spiritual experience to pour in. But in Buddha it is obvious that what happened was not mere silencing and deepening and detachment at the surface, but a complete cessation and annihilation of all that could give rise to the world of names and forms, a veritable "seedless" (nirbij) samadhi. His dialogues (and also his statues and pictures) exude peace, self-recollectedness, detachment and yet compassion, all with a powerful transcendental impress.

Though rare, yet the experience is not an isolated phenomenon. We find this in Vedantic literature and in other developed spiritualities, though the terms and images of the form-creating power or principle need not be the same in all experiences. Some have seen Godhead creating the worlds, oceans, stars, nights and days from his status of plenitude and self-sufficiency, by the creative power of his Word, or chit-Sakti. We have Platonic and neo-Platonic images of the process of creation or manifestation. Others have seen God pouring Himself out in multitudinous forms and yet remaining essentially unaffected by His creation. In the Gita, we find Sri Krishna revealing his mighty Form to Arjuna: time and space, high gods and noble warriors, everything in the three worlds rising from and rushing headlong into his "gaping mouth; tremendous-toothed and terrible to see".

There are other experiences less theistic though not less transcendental. Some have seen the world of relative forms

appearing and disappearing according to the laws of karma. Samkhya provides another account. In it we see Prakriti, moved forward by its three gunas, giving rise to the whole world of names and forms. At the time of dissolution the Prakriti in equilibrium withdraws unto itself all the forms and forces it created and goes out of manifestation. Buddha's experience is akin to the above in the sense that the process of creation or manifestation is not referred to a conscious principle, to a Purush or the God, but to a Law as immanent and absolute as the former. In Buddha, the terms of the Law of Dependent Origination on which hangs all the world of names and forms, sound like ordinary facts of life, but the knowledge of their operation as revealed to him was transcendental.

Quite in keeping with the practical approach of Buddha, the terms of his Law are rather individualized: Karma, contact, consciousness, desire, etc. On the other hand, Samkhya talks in the language of principles tattvas: prakriti, mahat, ahamkar, manas, tanmatras, etc.

II

We have discussed the similarity and even the sameness of Buddhistic experience of Nirvan with the Upanishadic experience of the Ultimate Reality. We must now also account for some of the differences, both primary as well as secondary. As one reads the literatures of Hinduism and Buddhism, one cannot help being impressed by the fact that the two create very different atmospheres or ethos. All transcendental experiences are incommunicable and inexpressible in the language of the mind, but the fact that one uses one particular language rather than another in reporting its mental impression of the transcendental experience is not accidental. It does convey, however imperfectly, something to the nature

of that experience. The difference in language also conveys a difference in the nature of the spiritual experiences. But the differences do not invalidate the truth of One spiritual life, or One spiritual reality.

The Divine is capable of and permits multiple contacts which when expressed in human language may even seem, to an external view, to exclude each other, but which in reality indicate the fact that the Ultimate Reality which is One in essence is multiple in its expression and experience.

Dryness of Buddhism: its 'Abstract' Approach

As one studies the early Buddhist literature, one encounters a certain atmosphere of dryness, of narrow and laborious self-culture, of strenuousness. One misses the atmosphere of effortlessness, fullness, ease and self-abandonment, which one comes across, say, in reading Chaitanya, Mira, and Alvar saints etc. In Buddhism, though one comes into intimate contact with the transcendental realm, one is particularly struck by the omission of any reference to God or soul, those mighty facts of spiritual experience which, except for illusionist monism of Shankara, the philosopher (who is very different from Shankara, the bhakta), and scholastic renderings of Samkhya, figure so much in the Upanishads, the Gita, the Mahabharata and in the religious consciousness of the country in general.

Regarding the nature of the Ultimate Reality, there are two traditions in India. One tradition images It impersonally as a featureless Brahma, as a formless, relationless Absolute. As one abstracted from the lesser and more mixed expressions and forms of the Ultimate Reality, one contacted Its highest attributes of Santi, sat, chit, and anand. The Supreme Reality could be experienced as peace or liberation, but It could also

be experienced as Bliss and Consciousness. Further it was possible to abstract even from these attributes. Bliss, Peace, Liberation and Consciousness would recede and one would be left aware of One Presence alone, One Isness, Something ever-present without a "name and habitation". One could possibly abstract even from this Presence and might experience the Ultimate Reality as some Blank or Sunya or even a Nihil, asat.

Buddha, it would appear, was in line with this too abstractive approach to the Divine. A Buddhist Nirvan, therefore, came to mean two things:

1. A rather too complete emptying out of the world and the mind of all forms and relations and a complete dying out of all phenomenal consciousness; and

2. A rather too full abstraction from all the forms, attributes and planes of the Divine - even from the attributes of sat chit, and anand.

In the first sense, Nirvan acquired several names all meaning more or less the same thing; emptying out the mind of all thought-forms and desire-complexes and even of all substantiality. It was called a letting go, a losing hold, complete cessation, complete fading out, a relinquishment, the perishing of passion, the perishing of hatred, the perishing of infatuation etc. In this sense, Nirvan was the beginning as well as the consummation of the Buddhist Way. It began with the practice of Buddhist Sila and ended in the dawn of Buddhist prajna, the supernatural knowledge regarding the unsubstantiality and painfulness of earthly life and earthly goods and the way out of it.

The process of progressive abstraction is carried all along the line in order to eliminate all that is less than Nirvan. The point is well brought out in the Buddhist accounts of a

deepening trance. The first trance is characterized by vitakka and vichar (reasoning and reflection), piti (exaltation), sukh (joy). In the second trance, vitakka and vichar cease. In the third trance, piti also ceases and one acquires upekkha (indifference). In the fourth trance, even sukh ceases and only ekagrata (one-pointedness) and supreme upekkha remain. As the samadhi deepens, the process of negation and abstraction continues and one enters the region of the four kinds of the boundless and the vast. Of one who has entered the realm of the infinity of space, the perception of form has stopped; of one who has entered the realm of the infinity of consciousness the perception of the realm of the infinity of space has ceased; of one who has entered the realm of nothingness the perception of the realm of infinity of consciousness has ceased; of one who has entered the realm of neither perception nor yet non-perception, the perception of the realm of nothingness has ceased; of one who has entered the cessation of perception and sensation, perception and sensation have ceased. Beyond the four "infinities" lies the region of Nirvan, the asamprajnana of Patanjal Yoga.

Saguna Brahma: Bhakti [6]

But this Ultimate Reality can be experienced not only as a featureless absolute, but also as the lord, a friend, a sustainer, a lover, a personal God to whom the secret aspirant in man gives his all, his mind, his soul, his strength, his heart. There is nothing petty or small or limited about this way of experiencing God. It is as vast, deep, sweet and total. It is the Purushottam to the Gita Who can be experienced without any form or attribute, but Who also comes to His devotee in the Form in which he Worships Him - and comes quite as fully and wholly. He is param-anand, sanatana, purna. He is not only transcendent, but immanent too. He is the sole Godhead

Who also becomes the jivas and the world. As Sri Chaitanya would say the Ultimate Reality is Sri Krishna, Who also becomes the Gopis, above all, Sri Radha, to taste and relish His own love-in-separation of Himself. Through Radha alone He knows how sweet, heart-ravishing and mind-and-soul-captivating He is.

Christianity and Islam charge that Hindus do not have a personal God. The charge is true in the sense that their God is not anthropomorphic and anthropopathic; nor is he a monolith, nor an aloof and incommunicable being who reveals himself only to a favoured individual called his Only Son or his Last Prophet. Hinduism conceives God differently, as an indwelling spirit seated in the heart of every seeker. Again, he is conceived not merely as a Judge or Father but also as a mother, a friend, a counsellor, a playmate, a consort, a lover and in hundred other ways. Sometimes some Christian saints and Muslim sufis too have done the same, but their experiences went beyond the theological bounds of their own religions. The fact is that spiritual theism, like spiritual monism and spiritual polytheism - all have found their most profound expression in Hinduism. God is transcendent and immanent; He is Impersonal and Personal; He is One and Many; He is Formless and yet He has his divine Form or Forms; He is Nameless, yet He has his Name or Names. In his personal manifestations, He indulges in His divine lilas, his divine Play and Pastimes; He has his divine Associates and divine Abodes (dhamas). Vaikunth, Vrindavan, Golok, Kailash are not mere images but transcendental realities of the highest order. Thus, the personalizing consciousness, like the imperso-nalizing one, has found its fullest play in Hinduism.

Anatta [7] **(not-Self)**

Another peculiarity of Buddhism is its denial of or rather silence regarding the individual human soul. Some hold that Buddha never denied the soul-principle; that what he denied was the ego, the human-personality or individual human mind which is generally mistaken for the human soul.[8] Plucking a handful of leaves from the tree under which he was sitting, he told Ananda that as there were many more leaves on the tree than in his palm, similarly the truths which he had withheld were more numerous than those he had revealed (Simpsapa sutta, Samyutta Nikay). "Soul" was one of these withheld truths. Revealing it would not have meant much. For, in the first instance, the truth of the soul cannot be described in human language. For another reason, because the affirmation of soul or any permanent self, either individual or cosmic, did not help the individual in arriving at those truths. That could only be done by a strenuous individual effort by negating all that was mutable, all that belonged to the phenomenal world. All thought-clusters, all sensation-groups, all form-constellations mistaken for permanent entities or abiding realities have to be negated.

On the other hand, affirmation of a permanent soul-principle (sassata-ditthi) would probably have been harmful. Aspirants tend to confuse or identify it with their body or mind; at least, almost invariably with the subtle and sattvika modifications or states of their mind, when in fact even in its highest reaches, it is merely a pudgala, a skandh, a concatenation of various principles and therefore subject to change and destruction, and empty and anatma.[9]

Whatever be the truth, denial or silence, the lack of affirmation of the soul-principle in the Buddhist literature will

have to be accounted for. For, the soul occupies a central position in the religious thinking of all mankind in different ages. The "person of the measure of a thumb", the "dwarf seated in the middle", in the language of the Upanishads, is a recurring experience of those attracted by the Divine call and life.

At a first glance, the absence of the soul in Buddha seems to agree with at least one interpretation of the Vedanta which denies any permanent individual soul in man. But this view neither agrees with other views of the Vedanta nor with the general religious intuition of man.

Apart from practical reasons we have discussed above there could be two other reasons of a spiritual nature for the denial of or silence about the question of the soul. One is that in a deep trance, all sense of individuality - even of spiritual individuality - is lost and one is immersed in a Nameless, Cosmic or Transcendental, Incommunicable Consciousness, in a Limitless Sunya or in an Ocean of Self-Existence. Here the testimony of Sri Aurobindo would be very interesting. According to him it is not possible to situate Nirvan as a world or plane for the Nirvan push is to a withdrawal from the world and world values: it, therefore, is a state of consciousness and rather super-consciousness without habitation or level. It is an absolute silence of mind and cessation of activities, constructions, representations, which can be so complete that not only to the silent mind but also to the passive sense the whole world is emptied of its stability and reality and things appear as only unsubstantial forms without any real habitation or else floating in something that is a nameless infinite. This infinite or else something still beyond is That which alone is real; an absolute calm, peace, liberation is the resulting state. In his own experience of Nirvan, Sri

Aurobindo lost all sense of the individual soul, any trace of the Self, individual or cosmic. He says, "I myself had my experience of Nirvana and silence in the Brahman ... ; it came first simply by an absolute stillness and blotting out as it were of all mental, emotional and other inner activities... 1 did not become aware of any pure '1' nor even of any self, impersonal or other - there was only an awareness of That as the sole Reality, all else being quite unsubstantial, void, non-real. As to what realized that reality, it was a nameless consciousness which was not other than that; one could perhaps say this, though hardly even so much as this, since there was no mental concept of it, but not more.... Consciousness (not this or that part of consciousness or an 'I' of any kind) suddenly emptied itself of all inner contents and remained aware only of unreal surroundings and of Something real but ineffable" (Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother, 1953, pp. 178-79).

So one need not discover one's soul or one's permanent individual principle, nor one need find the universal Self, the unchangeable principle behind the flux of things in order to make contact with the transcendental realm. One could begin by unloosening and dissolving that knot called the mind or the ego and directly seek and find release in some transcendence, in some nameless, formless, consciousness, which can neither be defined as Self, nor not-Self, which is aloof, incommunicable and without any nama or dhama. It could be the Nirvan of Buddha, or the Sunya or Nihil of the later-day Buddhists, or the "supreme Eternal Brahma which can be called neither being nor non-being" of the Gita.

Transitoriness and Painfulness of Existence

Besides the above, there are other differences of nuances and emphases. These generally relate to the emphasis on the

misery and transitoriness of this life. The Vedanta too has stressed the fleeting character of world's goods, but that is more than balanced by its emphasis on the bliss, peace, and freedom of the transcendental experience. That is why a reading of Hindu and Buddhist literatures leaves two distinctly different impressions on the mind.

The Vedanta has declared as much as Buddha did the impossibility of describing the transcendental experience in the language of the mind, but it did not shirk the responsibility of evoking it, conjuring it up, suggesting it by expressive ,images, symbols and parables. True, Buddha was a mastermind in the use of parables, but he used these to illustrate his discourses on morals and meditation, and on the "vanity" of all things, on the law of suffering and change which characterizes everything. On the other hand, the Vedanta used these parables and suggestive terminology to suggest, however imperfectly, something of the beauty and joy and freedom of the transcendental experience. This explains why Buddhism leaves an impression of emptiness and transience, while the Vedanta leaves an impression of joy and freedom.

In Buddhism, the bifurcation or divorce between the phenomenal and the transcendental worlds is rather too complete, too trenchant. There is no point of contact or interchange between the two. The phenomenal world is all misery and flux while the world beyond the realm of birth and death is aloof and incommunicable. The two worlds completely exclude each other. There are no reflections, no echoes, no responses of the one in the other.

In the Vedanta it is different. Even in the interpretations most akin to Buddhism, the world and the jivas derive their

existence from the Maya Shakti of the Divine. In the more affirmative interpretations, the world acquires a status of the fullest reality for the first time - a reality infinitely more full than the one given by materialists, if indeed their "reality" could be called by that name at all. True, the world is "nothing" without God, but there is no such world. Everything is derived from God, moves and has its being in God. God is behind, above, beneath and in the heart of everything. The human soul looks back to its Divine origin, and looks forward to its Divine destiny. It hungers for the Divine truth, its "pasturage" as Plato calls it, beholds it and in gazing upon it is "replenished and made glad", and fulfilled. In the language of the Gita and the Kath Upanishad, the tree of life has its "roots above". The world and its existence is grounded in God: "On it all the worlds do rest." What could be a surer, more solid foundation for human life on earth? According to the Upanishads, this is full with the fullness of That and what is above is also below. The terrestrial reflects the celestial. This teaching finds its echo in the Egyptian-Greek Hermetic tradition too.

We have not only the phenomenon of the jivas aspiring and ascending to Godhead, we find God coming down to the earth, putting on the limitations of our earthly life in order to save beings and help them in their spiritual evolution. So there is a loving interchange, and "open sesame" between Gods and men, between the Universal and the individual, between the Transcendental and the phenomenal. There is a relationship of antiphony between Bhagvan and His Bhakta. They live and move with their centres in each other. Each finds his perfect response, reflection, image and echo in the other. The Gita says that Gods and men are nourishers of each other.

Flowing from the above, there is another difference in the method of sadhana. There being no loving God, in Buddhism one has to work out one's salvation alone and with diligence. In the Vedanta there is no lack of call on the personal effort of the aspirant, but this must very soon give place to a complete call on the Divine, complete surrender to the Divine will. "Abandoning all duties, all methods, all techniques of meditation, come unto Me alone for shelter. I will liberate thee from all sins," is the message of Sri Krishna in the Gita. The personal effort of the sadhak, when it is sincere and persistent, evokes Divine help. The heavenly waters of Divine Grace fill him, inundate him, drown him. This difference in approach again makes Buddhism look dry, ascetic and arduous. While methods of sadhana developed on the basis of the Upanishads are joyous and effortless.

But let us not stress the differences too far. As we have seen there is an important tradition of the Vedanta which is akin to the negating trends in Buddhism. Similarly, there are many schools of Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist methods of sadhana which are akin to the more affirmative tradition of Hinduism. In these schools, one does not pass into a void or Sunya effected through negation of all thought-forms or thought-complexes and through detachment from the world (the process called Ashtang-Yog by the Hindus), but takes refuge in the "compassionate Buddha". Buddhism in these developments is no longer dry or flat, but rich and even luxuriant. But we have purposely refrained from a discussion of these powerful developments in Buddhism. For, we wanted to concentrate on those elements alone that are found in their earliest records and are agreed upon by all schools and determine where these elements stood in relation to Hinduism.

The nature of Buddhist Nothingness should not be misunderstood. In fact there is nothing peculiarly Buddhist about this Nothingness. It is the process of self-noughting enjoined by all religions and all mystic disciplines. For going into spiritual regions above it is necessary to pass through the doors of Nothingness. Therefore, an arhat has been defined as one in whom all outflows, all desires, sense-life have dried up.

Moreover ceasing-to-be is not a dry or life-denying process as many people outside the Mystic Way think. As useless sensations, mental constructions and idealizings, vital desires and sentimentalizings fall away from one's true being, one feels lighter, freer, happier. Life which was otherwise cluttered, dark, divided, painful, anxious and weary knows for the first time its true status of joy, freedom, light and power.

Nor the true nature of dukkha in Buddha which figures so much in his teachings and which prejudices people's thinking on Buddhism has been rightly understood. The status of dukkha is not psychological but metaphysical. At the level of duality and phenomenality, there can only be dukkha whether psychologically so manifested or not, or even when psychologically speaking, agreeable and pleasant sensations accompany the life at this plane. Indeed the basicality and universality of suffering is difficult to grasp and comprehend for a mind given to its usual life of sensations, pleasant or unpleasant. Buddha says, "It is difficult to shoot from a distance arrow after arrow through a narrow keyhole, and miss not once. It is more difficult to shoot and penetrate with the tip of a hair split a hundred times a piece of hair similarly split. it is still more difficult to penetrate to the fact that 'all this is suffering'."

The views of Hinduism and Buddhism on dukkha and anand are complementary, not contradictory. Looked at from below, from the viewpoint of duality and multiplicity, in divorce from the divine, the world is true to the Buddhist picture of suffering, misery, change and sorrow. But looked at from above, through the all-comprehensive view of the One or That, all is seeped in anand, everything is the ecstatic play of the Divine Mother, or the loving and rapturous lila of Sri Krishna or Shiva - to use traditional Hindu images. As the Taittariya Upanishad says, "Out of joy all this life came forth; by joy all this is sustained and into that joy all this will merge. Anand is Brahma."

Where is the contradiction?

Concluding Remarks

In the above discussion we found that Buddha, his spiritual experiences and teachings formed part of a Hindu tradition. He belonged to the Upanishadic heritage. He cannot be understood in any other sense. The attempt to understand him in isolation divorced from that tradition which he confirmed, enriched and represented, has only led to misunderstanding and distortion of his teachings. He himself claimed no originality. He claimed to have "seen an ancient way," followed an "ancient road." Those who claim to love Buddha should also love and cherish that tradition, which was his cradle, foster-mother, guide and inner inspiration. A good Buddhist has perforce to be a good Hindu too. But some self-styled, latter-day admirers of Buddha go out of their way to denounce and malign that tradition. It only shows lack of understanding on their part.

Like Buddha and later on Ashoka, let an Indian lover of Buddha learn to represent India again.[10] But let him also

realize that India is the land not only of Buddha but also of Rama, Krishna, Yajnavalkya, and mighty Vyas. Hinduism is not a one-book or one-prophet religion; it is the repository of man's nameless spiritual tradition and knowledge nourished by countless sages and seers. It does not give a neatly worked-out scheme of theological ideas; on the other hand, it tries to name the Nameless, express the Inexpressible, to give language to man's intuition of the Beyond with which he has tried to establish contact in many ways at different times, according to his capacity and preparation.

Hinduism is like a great reservoir of water from which many streams take their rise and to which they again repair after passing through many strange and fair lands. It is a great, creative matrix giving birth to many beautiful and living forms. Itself a historical, it has given birth to many sects and branches with interesting, chequered histories. Paying sole allegiance to the Guide within seated in the cave of the heart, it has put forward from time to time many teachers and sages of incomparable power and vision, incarnating the very Gods above and within.

Brahma-vada, Advaita, Samkhya, Buddhism, Jainism, Shakta-ism, Vaishnava-ism are noble children of the same mother. Each could be completely satisfying to its individual devotees so long as it does not forget its common heritage and common source. Accepted in a sectarian, exclusive sense, in forgetfulness of the whole, it becomes one-sided and even distorted. Hinduism is a lute yielding many sweet notes each deriving its meaning from its place in the total symphony. The Vedas say that there is one God but the wise call Him by different Names. Similarly, there is one Religion, one Perennial Philosophy, one Sanatan Dharma, the old name for Hinduism, which means the ever-living Law; but it is expressed in

different ways. Different religions and sects that come and go in history are facets of the same Religion, different attempts to reach the Inaccessible. All are noble attempts and all bring their heart's offerings to the same altar.

Recapturing their lost consciousness of identity, regaining their sense of the divine and the transcendent, and uniting into a mighty force of living spirituality, let Hinduism and Buddhism, the two sister-religions, come forward and offer their healing message to a troubled world. In the absence of this message inferior religious and secular ideologies and life-philosophies are having a field day and are doing immense damage to humanity. Having conquered Europe, they have also made deep inroads into Asia. China is already under their cruel domain. But China's cultural and spiritual roots are deep and her people are patient and long-suffering; so she will undoubtedly survive the vandalism of her own rulers; and the gentler and nobler qualities of her people will again triumph after the current fever is over and the present iconoclastic wave has exhausted itself. In fact, the signs of self-revival are already there.

Indian people, too, are not above the attraction of these ideologies. New India looks upon her spiritual inheritance as a reactionary and undesirable burden. The class that now controls the political, cultural and intellectual life of the country proudly and openly proclaims atheistic beliefs and positivistic values. Today, India prides herself in being a "secular" State, a secularity which is more anti-spiritual than anti-communal in its temper. [In fact, anti-Hindu than anti-communal]. In order to qualify for Government grants, Shanti Niketan, the famous institution found by the great Rabindra Nath Tagore, the poet of the soul's Godward aspiration and a great representative of undying India, had to give up its

Upanishadic motto: Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram. These figures represent the deepest and loftiest that spirituality has conceived about man, his aspirations and destiny, his hopes and possibilities. But to the modern secular ears of the present-day rulers, these terms sound communal and antiquated.

These rulers have little understanding of, or sympathy or patience with India's age-old values. But there is no doubt that they would fail and India would again regain her svadharma in not too distant future.

Western imperialism has destroyed many parts of the globe not only economically but also culturally. The indigenous religions of the countries of the two Americas have been completely overwhelmed. In the African continent, the local religions are under a systematic attack from Islamic and Christian ideologies. Economic imperialism is withdrawing but religious and spiritual aggression continues to operate unchecked with unprecedented ferocity and zeal. This continuing onslaught is more destructive than the old-style imperialism.

The dominant ideologies of the day bear many names and appear in many forms. Some of them are secular; others don religious garbs. But they have certain common characteristics: they are dogmatic, narrow, self-regarding, pretentious and megalomaniac. They claim to know the truth and they presume to impose it on others too. They lack inwardness, deeper charity and larger humanism. They are all based on a partial definition of man or on a distorted vision of Godhead.

Not taking up the religious variety for the time being, let us consider, for the sake of illustration, two dominant secular forms: Communism and Liberal Democracy. Apparently, they are at loggerheads but in some ways they are also

complementary forms and forces subserving the same psyche. For example, Soviet Communism is more aggressively atheistic but Liberal Democracy, as we find it in its manifestations in different countries, is more thoroughly hedonistic and individualistic. It increasingly understands and defines Truth and Ethics in pragmatic, positivistic and utilitarian terms. The sense of holiness, transcendence, and interconnectedness of things is fast going out of life. So the cults of emptiness and meaninglessness rule. Truth is merely that which is soft, odd and interesting. The sensation-seeking of this culture has already so weakened its people that this freer brand of materialism, so full of amusing dissipation, levity and casualness, may go down before Soviet Russia's more mechanistic and militant but also more austere and regimented variety.

On the other hand, while liberal democratic countries may lose politically, their current cultural values may win, particularly in the long run. Consumerism and hedonism are seductive and it is difficult to resist them. Their working is subtle and insidious. They seep, permeate, corrode like water. They undermine from within, with the willing co-operation of the victim. The frowning tyrant is no match for a smiling plutocrat. Where a stick fails, the carrot succeeds. The Brave New World scores over 1984.

This, of course, assumes that the present industrial culture will last indefinitely. But there are already signs of decay and exhaustion. The best minds of the day are prophesying doom. Psychologically, the system is already a failure. It no longer fulfills the deeper needs of man. The young men feel trapped and they are already in revolt. Knowing no better, it often takes them into undesirable directions.

In this confusion and crisis of values, in this general failure and forgetfulness, could someone re-awaken humanity, make it conscious of its spiritual heritage, conscious of its God-life and soul-journey? What part could India play in this re-awakening, re-affirmation - India that has been the priest of things belonging to the Spirit from very ancient times?

Footnotes:

1. This essay was first written and published in July, 1958. It subsequently saw two more editions published with minor changes here and there. It is being included in this volume [*'On Hinduism: Reviews and Reflections',* Voice of India, Delhi] too with small changes and addition of a few footnotes placed in brackets. It was read by Sri C. Rajagopalachari. We reproduce his comments from *'Swarajya'*, dated May 21, 1966: "*I read with great interest Sri Rain Swarup's scholarly paper on the intimate connection, amounting almost to identity, between Buddhistic philosophy, and the Vedanta of the Upanishads. Hindu conformism sensed the danger lurking in a close identity with a school of thought which may well be misunderstood to be a denial of God and soul. Consequently Hinduism kept Buddhism rigidly out of the pale. Sri Ram Swarup's paper explains how Hinduism saved itself from the dangers of its own philosophical dialectics through the cult of Bhakti and surrender. The concluding passage from Sri Ram Swarup's paper takes us to out own time:*

"*New India looks upon her spiritual inheritance as a reactionary and undesirable burden. The class that now controls the political, cultural and intellectual life of the country proudly and openly proclaims atheistic beliefs and positivistic values. Today India prides herself in being a 'secular' State, a secularity which is more anti-spiritual than anti-communal in its temper.*

"*Mere is a beautiful dialogue of Lord Buddha with a disciple monk who was dissatisfied with the Buddha's non-discussion of the nature of God and the Soul... then is reproduced the long dialogue with Venerable Malunkyaputta given in this essay.*"

2. Even Dr. Radhakrishnan, no foreigner to religious thought, has made statements which strengthen this positivistic interpretation of Buddhism. He says of Buddha that "he is a rationalist, since he wished to study reality or experience without any reference to supernatural

revelation. He wished to lead men by mere force of logic to his views... He wanted to establish a religion within the bounds of pure reason. He is a dialectician, arguing with his opponents to lead them to liberation." On another occasion, he turns Buddha into a modern agnostic. He declares: "Suspended judgment was Buddha's attitude."

3. We have refrained from mentioning here a third rendering of Buddhism which is existentialist. "Being trapped", "nothingness", "emptiness", "meaninglessness", the usual Sartrian fare, constitute, according to this rendering, the basic motifs of Buddhism.

4. According to Edward Conze, a great scholar of Buddhism, the term Empty (Shunya) though known to the Abhidharmists, occurs only on a few occasions in the Pali Canon, the earliest Buddhist literature.

5. [In most ancient Buddhistic literature, the Nirvanic state has been described in most positive terms and it has taken on almost the same epithets as the Brahmic state in the Upanishads and the Puranas. Rhys Davids tells us that Nirvan has been called "the harbour of refuge, the cool cave, the island amidst the floods, the place of bliss, emancipation, liberation, safety, the supreme, the transcendental, the uncreated, the transquil, the home of ease, the calm, the end of suffering, the medicine for all evil, the unshaken, the ambrosia, the immaterial, the imperishable, the abiding, the further shore, the unending, the bliss of effort, the supreme joy, the ineffable, the detachment, the holy city, and many others" (Early Buddhism).]

6. [We have already reproduced Sri Rajagopalachari's comments on this essay. He was a sage and a great spokesman of Hinduism. His views command our greatest respect. But I beg to make one clarification. Sri Rajagopalacharya agrees that there was a great affinity between the Vedanta and the Buddhist philosophy, but according to him Hinduism saw in it a danger of being misunderstood and identified with a school which denied God and soul; and it met the danger by developing the school of bhakti and surrender. I believe Hinduism sensed no such danger and it did not panic into bhakti and surrender because of any such danger. The fact is Bhakti and surrender even as a "school" are older than Buddhism. They are great truths of the Spirit and, as is to be expected, they found their great expression in a comprehensive religion like Hinduism as did other great truths of the

Spirit. At no stage, there was any intention of keeping Buddhism "out of the pale". Hindus regarded Buddha as a great teacher; many of them joined Buddhism, preached and propagated it; they built Buddhist monasteries, stupas and temples and fed Buddhist monks; they protected Buddhism and defended it when it was threatened; they gave refuge to Buddhists when they were persecuted in Persia, Khurasan, Iraq, Mosul by king Gushtasp and his descendents - in the same manner as they are doing it at present to Buddhist Chakmas fleeing from persecution in Bangladesh; they put Buddha in the pantheon of their avataras. In this decade, in Kerala two idols of Buddha were found buried; they were recovered and consecrated. One was placed in the temple at Kamapuram and has found the highest place along with the main deities of the temple; the other was placed in the Sree Krishna Temple in Mavelikara town. Both are worshipped by hundreds of devotees daily.]

7. There are definite statements by Buddha which clearly prove that he rejected theories which preached annihilation of Self altogether. Explaining why he refused to answer a certain monk in a simple yes or no, he said, "If I, Ananda, when the wandering monk Vacchagotta asked me 'Is there not the ego?' had answered: 'The ego is not,' then that, Ananda, would have confirmed the doctrine of the Samanas and the Brahmanas who believe in annihilation (uchchheda-diTThi)."

On another occasion, complaining against those who called him "an unbeliever" preaching "the real entity's destruction, annihilation, dying away" he said, "what I am not, what is not my doctrine, that I am accused of."

8. [Buddha's anatma is at heart Vedantic neti, neti. In dozens of places, Buddha repeatedly teaches that man's body or his mind, his psycho-physical being, is not his true self. In Chulla-sachchaka suttanta (Majjhima Nikaya), in Panchavaggiya sutta, in Sappaya (sampreya) sutta, Chakkhu-sutta, Rupa-sutta, Na Tumhaka sutta (all of Samyutta Nikaya), he preaches that man's eye or his ear, and the material form they reveal (rupa), and also his more subjective (ajjhatta) existence - vedana, samjna, samskara, vijnana - in short all, dharmas pertaining to him are anatma, are not his. They do not belong to him, nor does he belong to them; they are not he nor his. They are all changeful (anicca

or anitya) and sorrowful (dukkha) and it is better they are disowned. In Sappaya sutta, he asks whether it is proper to regard these things so transient and painful as, in anyway, yours or you or your atman?

[In the Upanishads, the atman represents the principle of consciousness and freedom. But Buddha limited his discussion to man's "conditioned" life and release from it; therefore, there is no wonder that in him and the anatma principle has found prominence and the atmic principle remains in the background. In Andha-bhuta sutta, Buddha found that everything related to man's conditioned life is blind - his eye, his ear, the material forms they reveal, his feeling, his perception, his ego, etc., all are blind. Similarly in the Kukkul sutta and Upchala sutta, and again in the Aditta sutta, he saw all forms (rup), all the worlds (lokas), and everything in and about man on fire - his eye, his ear, his sensations, perceptions, his mind; they are all burning with desire, burning with hatred, burning with infatuation, burning with ego, etc. Buddha repeatedly warned his disciples not to confuse their "conditioned" self - their psycho-physical aggregate - with themselves, with their true, liberated status in Nirvan, with atman, about which nothing can be said. But he knew that men are prone to this delusion and easily confuse the two; in Ditthi samyutta, he tells us how men make this double mistake: how while they think of the atman having material form, they regard their material form as their atman.]

9. That these skandhas, or sensation-complexes, or material-psychic aggregates have no permanent reality or self is all the Emptiness Buddha avowed. This point is well brought out in a dialogue in the Samyutta Nikay:

"To what extent is the world called 'empty', Lord?"

"Because it is empty of self or of what belongs to self, it is therefore said: 'The world is empty'. And what is empty of self and what belongs to self? The eye - all these are empty of self and of what belongs to self So too are ear, nose, tongue, body and mind (and their appropriate sense-data, appropriate consciousness and the impression on them of their appropriate sense-data) they are all empty of self and of what belongs to self. Also that feeling which arises, conditioned by impression on the eye, car nose, tongue, body, mind, whether it be pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant that too is empty of

self and of what belongs to self. Wherefore is the world called empty because it is empty of self and of what belongs to self."

10. Probably, in its world excursion, Buddhism followed the trail of Hinduism. It went where Hinduism was already, known and honoured. There it made a permanent niche in the affections of the people and destroyed nothing. Nourished by their psyche, it acquired a new wealth and became thoroughly indigenous. It was not governed by a distant mother-church. On the other hand, it drew is sustenance from the soil of its adoption. This prevented it from becoming the handmaid of Imperialism exploiting from afar. Its centre and authority was always local. Therefore, it became the genuine voice of the people who lived by it.